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For information

CANADA BORDER SERVICES AGENCY OPERATIONAL READINESS FOR SEPTEMBER 7, 2021, EASING OF BORDER MEASURES

For the Minister

SUMMARY

- On September 7, 2021, Canada's border measures will be further eased to allow for the entry of all fully vaccinated travellers, regardless of citizenship, subject to specific entry requirements.
- The Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) has worked with partners, including the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) and Transport Canada (TC), to ensure that the necessary operational and technical preparations are in place for this change.
- This change to Canada's border measures is expected to contribute to an increase in travel volumes, which, combined with existing public health processing requirements, may lead to border delays at major airports.
- The CBSA continues to work with federal partners, airlines, and airport authorities to reduce processing times while continuing to protect the safety of Canadians through necessary screening, quarantine, and enforcement measures.

BACKGROUND

On August 9, 2021, the Government of Canada (GoC) began allowing entry for discretionary purposes to all American citizens and permanent residents residing in the United States (US) who had been fully vaccinated with GoC-approved vaccines at least 14 days prior to entering Canada. Travel volumes to Canada spiked immediately following the change, with an estimated 65% increase in overall traveller volumes experienced from July to August 2021.

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On September 7, 2021, this easing of border measures will be extended to all fully vaccinated foreign nationals. In order to qualify, travellers will still be required to meet specific entry requirements, including: obtaining a pre-arrival molecular test within 72 hours of entry; and submitting travel information in advance via ArriveCAN with proof of vaccination, a list of countries visited within the previous 14 days, and a quarantine plan should the traveller become symptomatic or otherwise fail to meet the fully vaccinated traveller exemption.

CONSIDERATIONS

CBSA readiness

The CBSA has undertaken a number of measures to ensure operational readiness for the anticipated increase in traveller volumes resulting from the easing of restrictions to include all vaccinated travellers. These measures include providing technical briefings to regional operations on the changes, the development and distribution of updated written guidance and job aids for front-line staff, and the preparation of information materials for airlines and airport authorities to ensure the consistent and accurate application of border measures. As with the previous phases of reopening, a transitional exemption, embedded in the order in council, will be in place for the first 72 hours after September 7, 2021, to permit travellers who are unable to digitally enter their information in ArriveCAN to instead complete a paper-based process.

To reduce primary processing times, the CBSA has, to date, effected several changes to public health questioning. These changes include requiring travellers to answer questions regarding their quarantine plan solely through the ArriveCAN application, and amending the mandatory questioning scripts used by border services officers for both exempt and non-exempt travellers.

The CBSA has also refined its processes at major airports to triage disembarking passengers prior to their arrival at primary inspection, ensuring completion of ArriveCAN submissions and directly releasing compliant travellers wherever possible. At Toronto Pearson International Airport (TPIA), the CBSA has worked with the Greater Toronto Airports Authority to shift some flights between terminals to reduce operational pressures and benefit from capacity in less-busy terminals.

In collaboration with airlines and airport authorities, the CBSA has resumed the international-to-domestic (ITD) process at major airports, which allows travellers on certain flight routes to connect directly to their Canadian flight from trans-border (US) or international arrivals without collecting their baggage prior to CBSA primary inspection. ITD was implemented in Toronto, Vancouver, Calgary, and Montréal for all trans-border flights at the end of August 2021, with international flights to follow the week of September 7, 2021.

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Processing capacity challenges

Despite the efforts outlined above, CBSA processing capacity both at land and air ports of entry remains greatly reduced, due to increased processing times resulting from enhanced screening measures and from social distancing-based facility limitations. Processing times may also be impacted by language barriers, traveller preparation and knowledge of restrictions, and the completion/accuracy of information submitted in advance of travel through ArriveCAN.

Wait times have been experienced at the four major airports, with the most significant impact experienced at TPIA, Terminal 1. During busy periods when multiple international flight arrivals converge, airport authorities may hold passengers on board the aircraft for a period of time, or disembark passengers in groups using a “metered” approach, to avoid bottlenecks at various processing points. Capacity by PHAC quarantine officers and testing service providers also affects the number of travellers who can be processed; even where CBSA primary inspection processes are moving well, lineups at other stages may require that flights be held and/or metered to avoid overwhelming staff.

Given existing processing-capacity issues, there is a risk that any significant increase in travel volumes may generate increased border wait times, particularly at major airports. TPIA in particular may see an increase of flights being held and/or metered as airlines increase their flight routes from the US and international destinations as expected.

The CBSA has identified contingency plans that could be put into place as a temporary measure to facilitate processing in exceptional circumstances. Once processing returns to operationally manageable levels, the review threshold would return to normal levels.

Public health measures, namely in-Canada testing, has proven that fully vaccinated travellers average 0.02%-positive COVID-19 test results. Therefore, the relief valve measures will apply to the lowest-risk of travellers entering Canada who have had the opportunity to become familiar with Canada’s public health measures, fully vaccinated persons with a right of entry, and foreign nationals entering for a purpose other than a discretionary purpose.

Travel volumes

Although travel to Canada has historically dropped following the summer months, the CBSA forecasts that traveller volumes will continue to increase above and beyond August 2021 levels following the easing of border restrictions to all fully vaccinated foreign nationals. The eventual opening of the US land border for discretionary travel by Canadian citizens would further contribute to travel demand.

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For October 2021, the CBSA forecasts overall volumes of 1,758,000 travellers (land and air), which would represent a 28.4% increase over projected August 2021 volumes. Overall projected travel volumes are as follows:

		ACTUAL		FORECAST					
		Jul		Aug		Sep		Oct	
		Volume	% of 2019 Level	Volume	% of 2019 Level	Volume	% of 2019 Level	Volume	% of 2019 Level
AIR	Returning Canadians	260,748	16%	368,000	20%	494,000	31%	605,000	37%
	FN from U.S. Direct	24,537	3%	91,000	13%	101,000	17%	108,000	22%
	FN International and Via U.S.	98,140	11%	141,000	15%	227,000	30%	162,000	32%
	Air Total	383,425	11%	600,000	17%	822,000	28%	875,000	33%
LAND	Canadian Citizens and PRs	299,328	9%	383,000	10%	276,000	10%	517,000	20%
	Foreign Nationals	148,965	5%	386,000	14%	334,000	20%	366,000	25%
	Total	448,293	7%	769,000	12%	610,000	14%	883,000	22%
	Grand Total	831,718	9%	1,369,000	13%	1,432,000	19%	1,758,000	26%

NEXT STEPS

The CBSA is well positioned to maintain operations when the border further reopens on September 7, 2021, and will continue to monitor and work with regional operations to ensure as seamless a transition as possible.

The Agency will also continue to work closely with the PHAC, TC, and air industry stakeholders to identify any opportunities to further facilitate traveller processing while ensuring that proper measures remain in place to mitigate disease importation and reduce public health risks.

Please note that I am available to discuss, or have CBSA officials brief your staff, at your convenience.



September 03, 2021

John Ossowski
President

c.c.: Mr. Rob Stewart, Deputy Minister
Public Safety Canada